

Examining *The Da Vinci Code*

Introduction. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is becoming one of the most popular books of our time. It has sold 40 million copies worldwide, while being translated into 44 other languages. Also, this weekend, the movie version and video game will be released and is almost assured to be extremely popular.

Dan Brown states that the background facts in the book accurately represent "artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals." Both the book and subsequent interviews indicate that Brown believes the facts support the background history of his book. These "facts," as presented, naturally lead us to many disturbing conclusions.

The Da Vinci Code teaches us that the Bible and the Bible's doctrines cannot be trusted. "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false," laments one of Brown's characters. Because of its popularity and because it presents a subtle yet profound attack on the Christian faith, it is worthy of our examination.

I. **Plot Summary**

- A. The book opens with the curator of the Louvre Museum being murdered. He surrounds himself with a number of cryptic clues that sends a Harvard professor on a scavenger hunt of a lifetime, a search for the Holy Grail.
- B. As the plot unfolds, so the proposed truth of the Holy Grail is revealed. The secret of the Grail has been guarded by the secret order of the Priory of Sion (of which Leonardo da Vinci is a member) and Knights Templar for centuries. The reader is told there were secret gospels that were suppressed by the early church because the information they contained would devastate the Christian faith.
- C. The Holy Grail was first thought to be the cup or chalice from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper, or the cup that Joseph of Arimathea used to collect blood from Jesus' pierced body on the cross. But the proposed secret of the Holy Grail is that it is not a chalice at all, but a person, Mary Magdalene. Brown claims that "the quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene."
- D. The major character learns that rather than the apostle John being depicted in Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper, it is Mary Magdalene who is next to Jesus; she is the disciple whom Jesus loved. Brown points to the lack of a central chalice on the table as proof that the Grail is not a material vessel.
- E. Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had children. Moreover, Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene with the responsibility of leading the church, but Peter had a problem with that, so he declared Mary to be a

prostitute in an attempt to cut her out of any leadership role. When Jesus died on the cross, there being no resurrection to the story, Mary and her daughter fled to modern day France. Jesus left the work of spreading His ethics and of preserving His royal Davidic seed line to Mary. One of the main characters is a woman who is a descendant of that union.

- F. But the characters take a back seat to the conspiracy that gives the book its plot. *The Da Vinci Code's* driving claim is that the Christian faith is based upon a big lie (the deity of Christ) used by patriarchal oppressors to deny the true worship of the Divine Feminine.
- G. Brown claims that the early church propagated lies that devalued the female and favored masculine prominence and leadership. *The Da Vinci Code* claims that the New Testament is simply the result of a male-dominated church leadership inventing the Christian faith in order to control the Roman Empire and subsequent world history and then to oppress women and repress goddess-worship.
- H. The main characters deny the inspiration and authority of the biblical text and replace Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with the Gnostic gospels found just after World War II at Nag Hammadi, Egypt. The Gnostic texts are called the "unaltered gospels," and the New Testament texts are dismissed as propaganda for the goddess-bashers. One character explains that all this is "the greatest cover-up in human history."
- I. One character claims that more than 80 gospels were written and the church, guided by the Emperor Constantine, chose four that would support their tradition. Hence, Jesus was a mere human; and centuries passed before Christ was declared to be God. Through the centuries, the church suppressed this knowledge; otherwise Jesus' divinity would be challenged. It took the council of Nicea in A.D. 325 to make an official proclamation regarding the doctrine of His divinity.

II. ***Disturbing Conclusions***

- A. There are three conclusions made in the book:
 - 1. The Bible should not be trusted.
 - 2. Other books should be in the Bible.
 - 3. Jesus was not divine.
- B. The conclusion concerning the validity of the Bible is really at the heart of the other two, so it is a good place to begin.

III. ***Is Our Bible Reliable?***

- A. It is one thing to state that the Bible is the Christian's source of authority. But what about the Bible itself? Many people wonder if this collection of books is still reliable.

B. *The Da Vinci Code* joins the list of Mormons, Muslims and others who want us to believe that the Bible has been changed. The facts are against them because of two information sources which we will now consider.

1. Ancient manuscripts.

- a) All the books of the Bible were written and then copied by hand. The number of ancient copies of the New Testament text is dramatic. We have fragments and copies of the scriptures that go back very close to the time of the originals.
- b) In fact, there are over 24,000 complete or partial copies of the entire New Testament. That number is vast when compared to the number of manuscripts supporting other ancient books.
- c) Though hand copied manuscripts contain minor textual variations, we can know that the New Testament we have today is an accurate reflection of the earliest ancient text. By comparing existing copies of the Bible with these old manuscripts, scholars and experts affirm that the textual variations do not materially effect any significant teaching in the Bible.

2. Early Christian writers.

- a) The historical facts and writings of the earliest Christian leaders support the reliability of our current Bible. These writings are from church members (outside the Bible) who wrote about the Christian faith in the period immediately following the apostles, and in one case, when a book of the New Testament was being written (Clement wrote at the same time Revelation was written).
- b) The men who wrote these books are known as the "church fathers." Their works were produced between A.D. 90 and A.D. 160 and they quote from most of the books of the New Testament.
- c) These writings were created long before the Gnostic gospels which Dan Brown refers to in *The Da Vinci Code*. They show us that the early Christians trusted the books that are in our Bibles and they knew nothing of the radical ideas proposed by Brown and others.
- d) Some "church fathers," such as Ignatius (A.D. 115) and the Didache (A.D. 125), describe the beliefs and practices of the early church in great detail. The earliest church fathers were very familiar with the New Testament, and they provide a rich information source by which modern scholars can compare the modern Bible with ancient Greek text and confirm its accuracy.

C. On objective grounds, the Christian can trust that on all points of substance the Bible has come down to us as it was originally written.

IV. **How Did We Get Our Bible?**

- A. Where the Nag Hammadi texts the real gospels? No, for they are easily identifiable as Gnostic literature peripheral to the scriptures. "Canon" is often the term used to describe the list of New Testament books. "Canon" referred to a reed or a tool used for measurement, much like our rulers. Certain books that complied with the correct standards were accepted as inspired.
1. The church did not create the canon. It did not determine which books would be called scripture.
 2. Instead, the church recognized which books had been inspired from their inception. It was accepted by the people of God because it is the word of God.
- B. The Old Testament was written about 1400-400 B.C. In Luke 24:44, Jesus referred to the divisions of the Old Testament as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The following are the standards for inclusion in the Old Testament canon:
1. Was the book accepted in past Hebrew collections? The Talmud (a collection of ancient Rabbinical writings) accepts same 39 books as we do. It says the last book to be written was Malachi.
 2. Was the book referred to by Christ?
 3. Was the book referred to by the apostles and other New Testament writers?
 4. Does the book contain internal evidence of inspiration?
 5. Is the book free from contradictions and absurdities?
- C. The New Testament was written about A.D. 50-95.
1. Churches collected these writings, viewing them as much a part of God's word as the Old Testament (1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7; 2 Peter 3:16).
 - a) New Testament books were for congregational use (Colossians 4:16).
 - b) New Testament books were for individual use (Luke 1:1-4).
 - c) New Testament books were for use in different provinces (Galatians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).
 - d) New Testament books were for use everywhere (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
 2. Standards for inclusion in New Testament canon:
 - a) Apostolic approval. This does not necessarily mean apostolic authorship.
 - b) Genuineness. Is it the product of those for whom it is claimed?
 - c) Authenticity. Is it a record of actual facts truly stated?
 - (1) An epistle of Paul could be identified by the way in which it was written (2 Thessalonians 3:17; Galatians 6:11).
 - (2) Letters were sent by known associates of Paul or the church

(2 Corinthians 7:5-10, 14; Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-9).

d) Testimony. What are the contents of the book itself and what is the testimony of early writers regarding the book?

(1) Some claim the canon was not fixed until A.D. 400; therefore, ancient disciples could not use any means of establishing Bible authority at that time.

(2) This is incorrect because councils were held in 400's, but the canon involved the writing of New Testament books, obviously done much earlier. Each letter by itself was authoritative (1 Corinthians 14:37).

(a) Origen (185-254) mentions most books of the New Testament by name, stating that a few were disputed by some.

(b) Eusebius (265-340) mentions all as acknowledged except James, Jude, 2 Peter and 2-3 John. He would have liked to reject Revelation because he thought it taught millenarianism.

i) Such views of early writers demonstrate the authenticity of the New Testament books.

ii) Even the "embarrassments" are faithfully preserved (Matthew 10:23; 18:1-6).

(c) Athanasius (367) gave us the earliest list of New Testament books that are exactly like our present New Testament.

V. ***Was Jesus Divine?***

A. The New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the one who fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. When Jesus came, God fully and finally revealed Himself (John 12:44-50). There are several lines of evidence which support the divinity of Jesus.

1. The Son of God.

a) Matthew 3:17; 17:5.

b) Romans 1:4.

c) Matthew 16:16.

d) John 11:27.

2. Worthy of worship.

a) Matthew 4:10.

b) Matthew 14:33.

3. Equal with the Father.

a) John 10:30, 33.

b) John 8:19.

c) John 15:23.

- d) Philippians 2:6.
- 4. Attributes of deity.
 - a) John 1:1; 8:58.
 - b) John 1:42-43; 11:14.
 - c) John 6:69.
- 5. Titles of deity.
 - a) Matthew 1:23.
 - b) John 1:1, 14.
 - c) Titus 2:13.
 - d) 1 John 5:20.
- B. It was a common belief before the council of Nicea that Jesus was God. This belief was formally affirmed, not by Constantine, but by the leaders of the ancient church at Nicea.
 - 1. The real council of Nicea adopted a creed in order to reject the heretical teachings of Arius, who taught that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father. Brown weaves fact and fiction with such recklessness that the average reader will assume all these claims to be factual.
 - 2. The council of Nicea did not "invent" the divinity of Jesus. This was already the declaration of the church, claimed by Jesus Himself and proclaimed by the apostles. The council proclaimed this as the faith of the church and named Arianism as a heresy and Arians as heretics.
- C. Jesus committed His words and teachings to the apostles as the basis of obedience for all future Christians (Matthew 28:18-20).
 - 1. Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, which was really the inspired teachings of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:42).
 - 2. Jesus and His words were God's final message for the human race (Hebrews 1:1-2). It was "once for all delivered" (Jude 3).

Conclusion. Ben Witherington III tells us that Brown's handling of historical documents and history shows "he is not merely out of his depth, he is also a purveyor of errors of both fact and interpretation, including some mistakes that even the most amateur student of history should never make." Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), but in the end, falsehood cannot stand if people know the truth. We can know the truth through honest study and investigation.